DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 273 365 PS 015 990

AUTHOR Samah, Asiah bt. Abu
TITLE Curriculum and the Adolescent: A Malaysian Perspective.
PUB DATE [84]
NOTE 11p.; In "Preparation for Adulthood. Third Asian Workshop on Child and Adolescent Development"; see PS 015 978.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Accountability; *Adolescents; *Curriculum Development; *Educational Improvement; Foreign Countries; Individual Characteristics; *Individual Needs; Secondary Education; *Secondary School Curriculum; *Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Malaysia

ABSTRACT

A Malaysian perspective on the secondary school curriculum and the adolescent is offered in this paper. The discussion initially reviews characteristics of adolescents, focusing on their psychological needs, and particularly, friendship, love and affection, interests, discipline and responsibility, environmental pressures, dislocation of the line of authority in the family, value conflicts, an enriched environment, the success syndrome, pampering, and the knowledge explosion. Subsequent discussion explores the direction of the Malaysian secondary schools, pointing out aspects needing improvement and implications of recommended improvements for curriculum development. Several approaches by which the curriculum should strive to satisfy adolescent developmental needs are listed along with ways of establishing healthy teacher-pupil relationships, improving curriculum content, and increasing student accountability. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED273365

Curriculum and the Adolescent: a Malaysian Perspective

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Chiam Heng Keng

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Asiah bt. Abu Samah

PS 015990

INTRODUCTION

A cursory survey of the international scene reveals the vast amount of literature available concerning the psychology and social behaviour of the young – especially those of secondary school age, the adolescents. Unfortunately, most of this literature is western in context and orientation. While general patterns of adolescent development and characteristics are available in such literature, specific patterns relevant to adolescents in Malaysia are scarce. The task of curriculum planning and development is made more difficult for the curriculum planner in that there has not been very serious attempts made at linking curriculum goals, objectives, content and methodology with adolescent psychology and sociology. There is a need therefore to encourage educational research endeavours in this area in Malaysia. Only when we have more information on the psychological and sociological behaviours of Malaysian adolescents and the interactive effects of such behaviours with the school curriculum can we then get a clearer Malaysian perspective on the curriculum and the adolescent.

This paper is a modest attempt at building this perspective based on whatever little is known of adolescent behaviour and characteristics in Malaysia, and on collective personal experiences. It is aimed at raising questions rather than prescribing answers.

ADOLESCENT CHARACTERISTICS

Sorenson has described adolescence as 'much more than one rung up the ladder from childhood. It is a built-in, necessary transition period for ego development. It is a leave-taking of the dependencies of childhood and a

precocious reach for adulthood. An adolescent is a traveller who has left one place and has not reached the next ...'.

The transition from childhood to adulthood is normally a difficult period for parents, teachers and society at large but most of all for the adolescent concerned. The unfolding of adolescent characteristics is a natural process and education should aim at enriching and, if possible, enhancing the process. But before education could begin to tackle this gigantic task, there is a need to unravel and understand a host of needs and phenomena that make up and surround the adolescent.

Psychological Needs

After sifting through the literature, Hemming arrives at a list of basic psychological needs of the adolescent. These include:

Love and security	Fun and adventure
Affection and warmth	New experiences
Friendship	Emotional release
Understanding and sympathy	Practice in making decisions
Encouragement	A chance to make mistakes
Confidence and self-esteem	Handling responsibility
Recognition and praise	Freedom within agreed limits
Achievement and success	Sympathetic adult guidance
Appreciation and respect	Trust
Stimulation and challenge	Sense of identity

Let us have a closer look at some of these needs.

Friendship

All young people share a strong need to establish friendship bonds not only with their peers but also with adults. Bonds with adults help to strengthen self-confidence. It is not evident whether Malaysian parents are actually psychologically and culturally prepared to play this role with their children. Although we do know of instances where such firm friendly bonds do occur between parents and offspring, the authoritarian relationship may be more prevalent. Certainly, friendship relations between teachers and pupils are rare in our secondary schools. In our primary schools, there are early signs that such bonds are strengthening, albeit tentatively, with the New Primary School Curriculum implemented last year (1983).

Allied to friendship is the search for a *role model*. Adolescents expect their elders to set ideal standards that they can look up to and emulate. Unfortunately, such roles and standards are difficult to establish or maintain. Young people get easily disillusioned and seek out role models from among entertainers, athletes, sportsmen and the like where excellence is more apparent.

Love and Affection

Often we hear parents and sometimes teachers complaining of their children's/pupils' ingratitude for not returning the love that parents/teachers have showered on them. Love is a seemingly simple concept but in practice, it can be very complicated. What parents and teachers claim to be love can even appear as oppression or authoritarianism to the child. The young are very sensitive to the quality of adults' orientations toward them. The love that they seek has to go hand in hand with affection, understanding and even constant firmness. Excessive and indulgent display of love can lead to spoiling rather than genuine caring.

Interests

In their natural state, the young have varied interests though, admittedly, of a transitional nature. These interests are nevertheless vital for keeping up a zest for life and for making mundane chores bearable and even stimulating. It may be that under the present pressure of academic work in schools and the lack of recreational facilities in the community, these interests either get nipped in the bud or are negatively channelled into undesirable pursuits like smoking, drugs and other deviant behaviours.

Discipline and Responsibility

Adolescents have great capacity for responsible behaviour and exercising a high degree of self-discipline. But, alas, our secondary schools have become so big and impersonal that it is difficult to provide for these experiences adequately. There are just not enough opportunities and situations for every adolescent to learn self-discipline and a sense of responsibility. To add to this problem, the child is exposed to so many irresponsible and indisciplined 'role models' around him within and outside the school. It has been said that a great deal of deviant behaviour among youngsters arose from their need to be disciplined. However, the way we educationists handle the deviant behaviour does not resolve the problem.

Environmental Pressures

The twentieth century has brought with it external pressures that further distort adolescent characteristics. With the onset of such pressures, the adolescent is left to make his/her own adjustments. Little help comes from the home or school. In face, the community sometimes becomes even hostile towards the adolescent upon manifestations of such stress symptoms. What are some of these environmental pressures?

Dislocation of the Authority Line

The traditional authority line between parents and children are fast breaking down. However, societal norms, as established by adults over many generations, still support authoritarian filial relationships. The

promotion of an enquiring mind in school, in public life and in government tends to challenge such age old tradition and practice. What is the adult's answer to all of this? Can we contain this tide of challenge which we ourselves have brought about? If we cannot contain it, do we have a substitutive model for such relationships that will take care of the dislocation?

Value Conflicts

Traditional values are normally transmitted from generation to generation through a well established authority line. With this dislocation of the authority line, there is now no common sharing of what is considered accepted values between the generations. Instead, there is constant questioning of the place and importance of certain values by the young. This does not mean that the young does not have values. Rather, their interpretation and ranking of these values differ drastically from those of adults. But then, the overt behaviour of many adults in private and public life gives no reassurance to the young regarding their traditional place and role.

Enriched Environment

The last quarter of the twentieth century has brought in its wake a multitude of interests to tempt the young. It has reached a point when the young could easily be led to believe that indulging in all these interests is what life is all about (what a shuddering thought!). These interests are bound to multiply, taunting the young to their very limits. These are really distractions from the more fundamental concerns of personal worth and potentials. Through careful selection and guidance, these interests could provide the motivation and zeal required for the pursuit of those more fundamental concerns of life.

Success Syndrome

The pressures from parents, teachers and society at large to excel in school work and adult life is so great that very high standards are set at school. Many are unable to cope with this. More often than not, teachers are unable to lead pupils to achieve these high standards. Instead there is a barrage of censure for not keeping up.

Pampering

The rapid socio-economic changes that have taken place over the last three decades in this country has resulted in greater affluence among certain quarters of life. These affluent parents tend to pamper their children with a life style they themselves did not enjoy. 'I would like to give my child what I myself could not get from my own parents' is a maxim that seems to act as a driving force towards this indulgence. Children of such parents see the easy side of life and imagine that the

world owes them a living . The discipline of hard work, thrift and perseverance are not acquired. They indulge themselves in a variety of interests, some of which can be very costly. These could be momentary pastimes or habit forming. What is of grave concern is that not all these interests are suitable for the young.

Knowledge Explosion

With the economic, scientific and technological advancements made after the Second World War, there has been a knowledge explosion of unprecedented quantity and volume. Adolescents in school are faced with an increasing curriculum content load. There has not been much emphasis in our teaching and learning strategies on ways of acquiring this knowledge through self-study, self-learning methods, information retrieval and the like. The tendency is to cram as much of this knowledge as possible into our students.

The adolescent of today has to travel from the more secure innocence of childhood to the desired destination of adulthood through a perilous and hazardous path. *Tan Sri* Murad Mohd. Noor, the Director-General of Education, Malaysia, has perceptively and aptly analysed the phenomena and dilemma that confront educationists.

> I would like to suggest that these (phenomena) are outcomes of change which come about due to the tension between the forces of materialism that bring in their wake a new rationality and modernity that erode and, in some cases, destroy social institutions with its traditions, its value systems, and its morality.
> I believe that why we experience all these trauma and uncertainty is because in the process of adapting to the material order, we have compromised our traditions, morality and value system. We thought it was the modern thing to do, to keep with the times. And so we kept aping others. And everytime we did that, we compromised our traditions, our morality and our value systems. In the end, we are left with nothing of the old order which shapes our lives and gives meaning and purpose to what we do. And so we try to operate our lives on the norms of formal rationality based on the materialistic consideration, some on pure materialism, while some on a corrupt version of it .... Man cannot base his morality on the rationality of materialism.

DIRECTION OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Having examined the basic psychological needs of adolescents and appreciating the heavy socio-ecological and educational pressures that beset them in their hazardous journey to adulthood, how do we begin to alleviate our secondary schools from the backwaters of materialistic rationality? As a matter of fact, our school system has undergone tremendous changes pedagogically, organisationally and administratively over the

last quarter of a century. However, these changes have been more quantitative than qualitative in nature. In some cases, the changes have been cosmetic and even superficial. The secondary school still has a long way to go to contend with the complex nature of adolescent problems it has to face.

The secondary school needs improvement along several dimensions Briefly these can be summarised thus:

(1) A review of the philosophy and goals of education; are we too engrossed with rationalising materialistic orientations to the detriment of moral and humanistic values?
(2) A change in overall climate of the school and classroom from an authoritarian atmosphere to a more democratic surrounding.
(3) The development and sustenance of more humane contact between teachers and pupils.
(4) Shedding of the curriculum load to more realistic levels and content.
(5) Improving teaching styles and techniques of teachers. More active pupil participation in learning is to be encouraged.
(6) The practice of values beyond the classroom should be enhanced and properly consolidated with classroom practice.
(7) Overall performance of pupils over a longer period should be given priority in terms of continuous pupil evaluation rather than have it based on only one examination.

Curriculum Implications

Too often in the past, we have heard criticisms to the effect that our schools are more interested in teaching rather than educating our youngsters. It is sometimes questioned if this is not true in view of what we prescribe (or suggest) in our courses of studies (for example, syllabuses and teachers' guides) and what we know in terms of classroom strategies used by teachers in schools.

One just needs to look at any current secondary school syllabus to find listings of objectives and content to be *taught*, accompanied perhaps by some pedagogical hints on *how* the teaching is to be done. These listings may or may not have taken into consideration the needs and interests of the learners. Even if they have, these considerations are usually implicit rather than explicit.

If we accept the *educational* definition of curriculum to be the sum total of all teaching-learning activities and experiences in a school, then curricular listings as referred to previously are insufficient.

> Of course they are not meant to be comprehensive and all-encompassing, says the curriculum planner and developer. The curriculum comes to life in the hands of the teacher, the implementer. And it is the teacher who should relate the curriculum to the needs,

interests and aptitude of the children they teach in order to ensure the total educational experience.

Thus, the ball is kicked back to the teacher's side of the court. However, does the answer really rest with the teacher alone? Does the curriculum planner not have a responsibility in ensuring that this total meaningful educational experience will take place?

To my mind, the curriculum planner does have a significant role beyond the generating of mere listings of objectives and content. He is dealing not just with the nature and intricacies of the subject matter to be taught through various subjects in the school curriculum but more so with holistic considerations in the realm of educational philosophy, psychology, sociology and technology.

Whether he realises it or not, the curriculum planner is operating at a very basic level of human, societal and political engineering. His statement of curriculum goals and objectives are signposts for the directions this engineering is to pursue. But if he is not careful in his engineering approach and strategy, he may just be making lofty but empty enunciations of intent. For example, if he is too preoccupied with manpower demands and other 'adult' utilitarian considerations, and allows the actual needs and aspirations of the pupils to take a back seat, his curriculum may come up against some painful jolts in the course of its implementation.

The curriculum in its broad sense should deal not only with teaching-learning objectives and content but also teaching-learning strategies and ways of organising and influencing the school, home and community environment. The perceptions and motivations of the adolescent are basically influenced by environmental factors. The young need a great deal of guidance and reassurance while experimenting with the environment. The line separating experiment and reality is such a thin one in the life of an adolescent. Real-life situations tend to emerge suddenly and there is a greater probability for mistakes in dealing with these situations. However, mistakes ought to be allowed and forgiven as long as one learns from them.

Basic Thrust

The curriculum should strive to meet with the full adolescent development of the child through several approaches, for example:

Understanding and analysing prevalent pressures and challenges.
Adjusting to these pressures and gaining a sense of security and self-confidence.
Establishing healthy adult-adolescent relationships.
Establishing worthwhile goals and/or making goals seem worthwhile.

Specific Curricular Contributions

The curricular contributions towards the realisation of the full potential of the adolescent needs to be multi-pronged.

Through Teaching/Learning Strategies

The overriding concern in dealing with adolescents would be to establish healthy teacher-pupil relationships. These could be established through the following means:

(a) Teachers should help pupils go beyond the prescribed content of a discipline and deal with the basic relevance of the discipline to mankind as a whole and to the community and the individual in particular.

(b) Moral and ethical questions related to the content need to be aired freely and discussed – pupils need to be encouraged to formulate their own conclusions for whatever they are worth. Any contribution is worthwhile contribution. Doubts, fears and misgivings are to be freely expressed. Through such emotional release comes acceptability of oneself and respect for the views of others. Bonds are also established.

(c) Above all, pupils are to be helped to understand their own strengths and weaknesses through a realistic appraisal of themselves. Their weaknesses are not permanent features and can be remedied. Strengths can be further improved.

(d) Teacher-pupil relationships need to be reviewed as follows:

Teachers need to get closer to pupils as individuals.

Teachers need to understand the thinking processes and emotional states of their pupils through formal interactions in class as well as through informal links.

Counselling services should not be regarded as being merely 'clinical'. The greater responsibility of counselling is to reach the pupil and, through an understanding of the inner make-up of the person, to provide guidance on vocational and other emotional or practical matters.

Every teacher should accept counselling and character development of his pupils as a primary responsibility.

Pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes and courses need to accord primary importance to these concerns.

Teacher's guides should include information and guidance on the teachers' role in adolescent development.

Through Curriculum Content

(a) A holistic view of the entire curriculum is to be taken across subject and content areas so that adolescent development is taken into account. Such knowledge is to contribute towards an understanding of personal growth in terms of values, personality traits and growth characteristics and adjustment, and emotional adjustment interactional modes.

(b) Opportunities for consolidating and summarising information regarding adolescent growth and adjustment needs to be built into subjects as much as possible and across subject areas through particular curriculum areas like social studies, moral education etc.

(c) Reading material covering these concerns are to be identified, compiled and prescribed both for the teacher and pupils. Libraries should have more adolescent-related books and materials.

(d) More real life situations taken from personal experiences and the mass media are to be included in the teaching-learning strategies.

(e) Subjects like moral education, religious education, social studies and languages should accord adolescent development high priority.

(f) One important developmental task the curriculum could promote is the ability of the child to discriminate and choose when faced with alternatives. In such situations, one has to devise criteria for making choices based on personal as well as global perspectives. Discrimination based on good taste and sound judgement is what consumer education is all about.

Through Accountability

Situations could deliberately be created within the classroom, in school, at home and in the community where adolescents are given responsibilities which enable them to interact with others and through this, exercise judgement and account for their actions. This is a very effective way of encouraging pupils to assess themselves under pressure.

Whatever renovation we do in the area of curriculum planning or school management, we need to keep in our minds that the adolescent is 'a traveller who has left one place and has not reached the next'. Our exploration into the world of the adolescent just now shows how hazardous and lonesome this journey is. He needs all the friendship, warmth, understanding and patient guidance that we adults can give to help him make that journey. A curriculum programme prepared by planners should be sensitive to these needs and if handled by teachers who *care*, it can go a long way towards making this journey more comfortable and meaningful.

Whether our secondary education in Malaysia is heading in this direction in the near or distant future depends a great deal on what is being done now.

REFERENCES

Alexander, W.M (ed.), *The changing high school curriculum: readings*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972.

Chiam, H.K., 'Indiscipline in school: some case studies', *Fikiran-fikiran mengenai pendidikan di Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur, Utusan Publications, 1983.

Goodlad, J.I., 'A study of schooling: some findings and hypotheses', *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 1983.

Hemming, J., *You and your adolescent*, London, Ebury Press, 1975.

Hurlock, E B., *Adolescent development*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1975.

Kelly, J.G (ed.), *Adolescent boys in high school: a psychological study of coping and adaptation*, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1979.

Murad b. Mohd. Noor, *Tan Sri*, 'The planning of education in the context of social and moral values', unpublished paper presented at ACEID-UNESCO meeting, Bangkok, March 1984.

Sorenson, R., 'Youth's need for challenge and place in society', *Children, 9, 1962.*